

# American Humane Association™

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# Research Synthesis on Child Welfare Disproportionality and Disparities

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# Review Scope

- Roughly based on research since 2006
- Intention was to be objective
- Peer review and fugitive literature
- Review contains over 200 references
- Over 400 documents were considered for inclusion
- Definitions
  - Disproportionality
  - Disparity

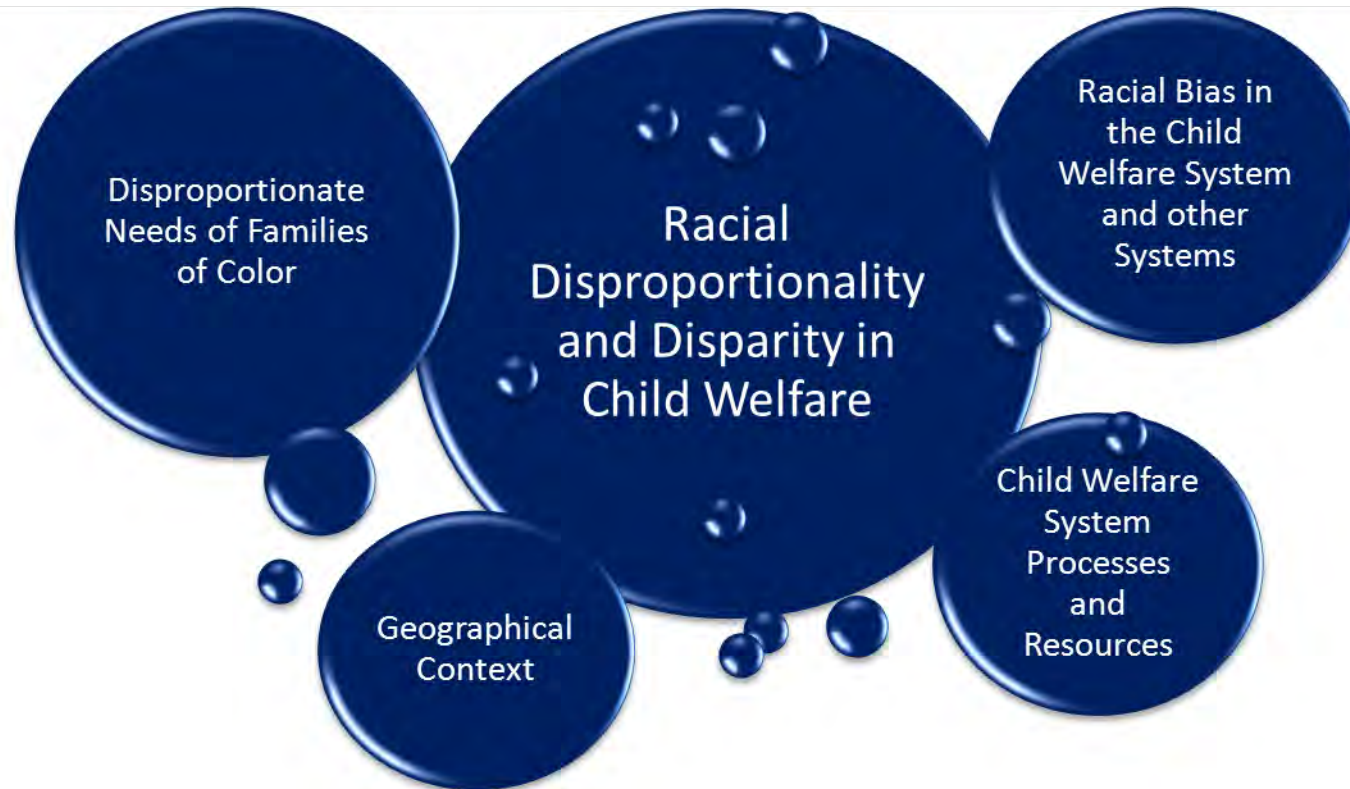
# **WHAT DEFINITIONS OF DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY DID WE USE TO GUIDE THE SYNTHESIS?**

# Disproportionality and Disparity

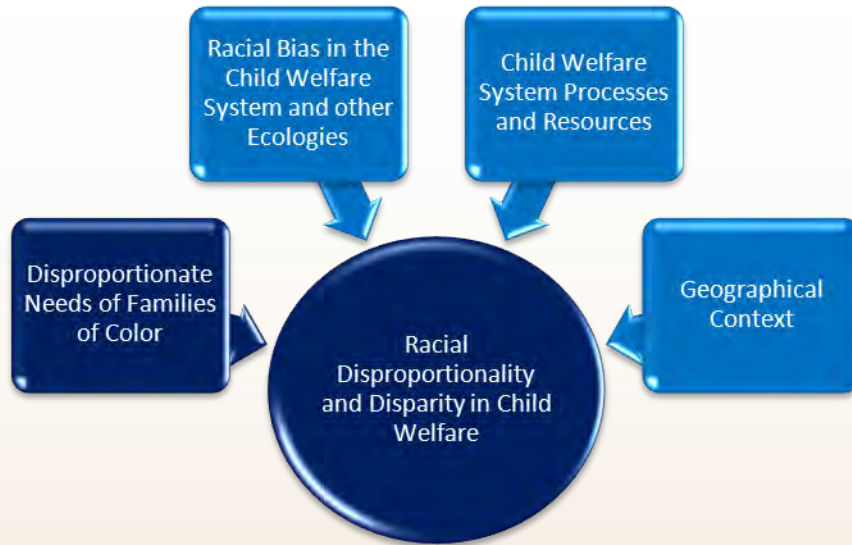
- “**Disproportionality** is the ratio of the percent of persons of a certain race or ethnicity in a target population (e.g., children who are substantiated for maltreatment) to the percentage of persons of the same group in a reference (or base) population. The reference population can refer to the overall population (unconditional) or the population who experiences a specific decision point (conditional).” (Myers, 2010)
- “**Disparity** is the comparison of the ratio of one race or ethnic group in an event to the representation of another race or ethnic group who experienced the same event. Like disproportionality, the reference population in the denominator for both groups can refer to the overall population (unconditional) of the group or the population among the group who experiences a specific decision point (conditional). A disparity exists when the ratios being compared are not equal.” (Myers, 2010)

**WHAT ARE THE  
EXPLANATORY FACTORS  
INCLUDING THE INTERPLAY  
OF RACE, PLACE, POVERTY  
AND FAMILY STRUCTURE  
ASSOCIATED WITH RACIAL  
DISPARITIES?**

# Explanatory Framework



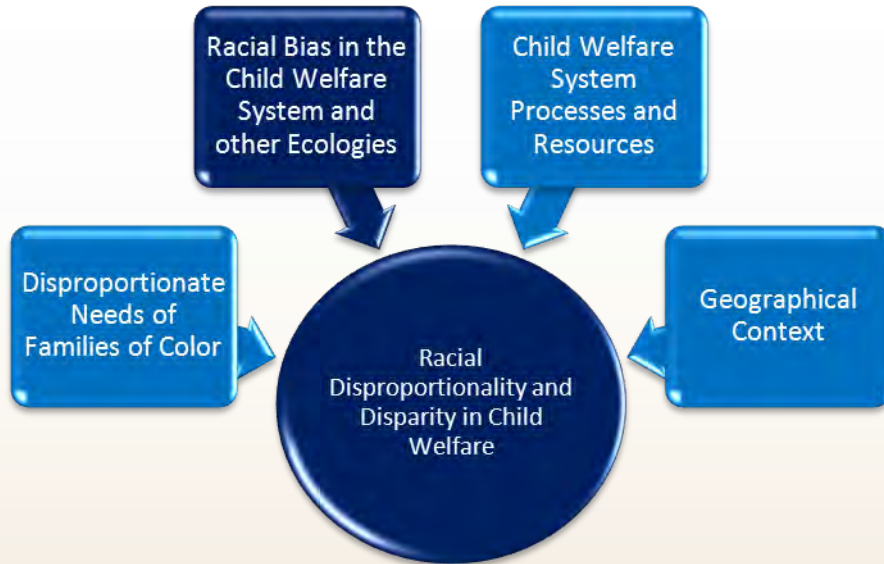
# Disproportionate Needs of Families of Color



- Poverty
- Substance Abuse
- Single Parenthood
- Mental Health Challenges
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Parent Incarceration
- Child Age and Functioning

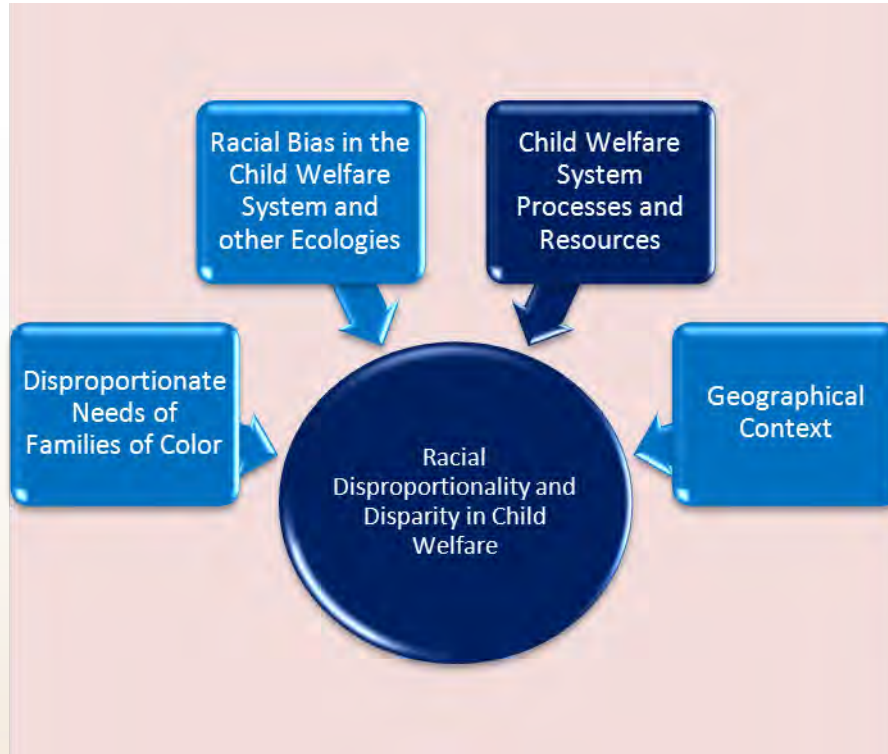


# Racial Bias/Discrimination in the Child Welfare System and Other Systems



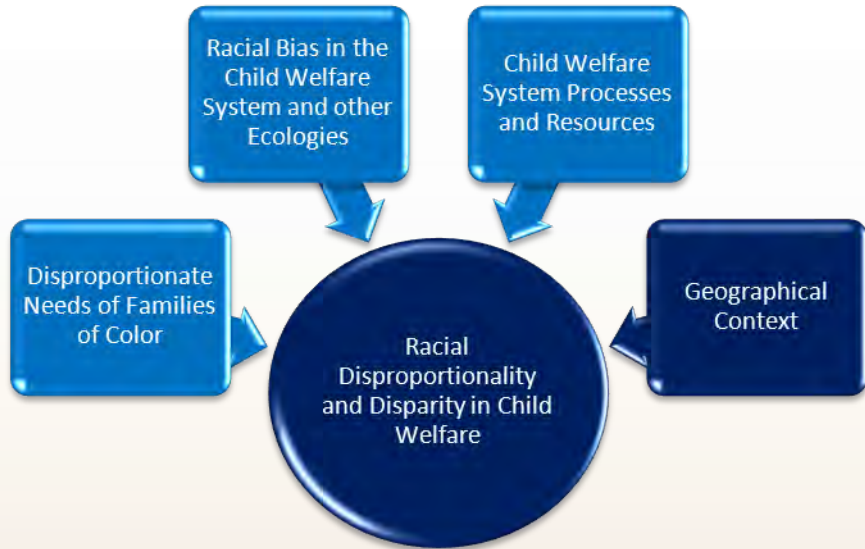
- Reporter Bias
- Caseworker Bias
- Cultural Sensitivity and Competence
- Institutional Racism
  - Child Welfare
  - Hospitals
  - Courts
  - Law Enforcement
  - Education

# Child Welfare System Processes and Resources



- Lack of Agency Resources
- Caseworker Factors
- Lack of Culturally Appropriate Services
- Caseworker/family race matching
- Multiplicative processes along child welfare continuum

# Geographical Context



- Neighborhood Segregation
- Neighborhood Economic and Social Resources
- Concentration of poverty
- Jurisdiction-specific child welfare policy and practice

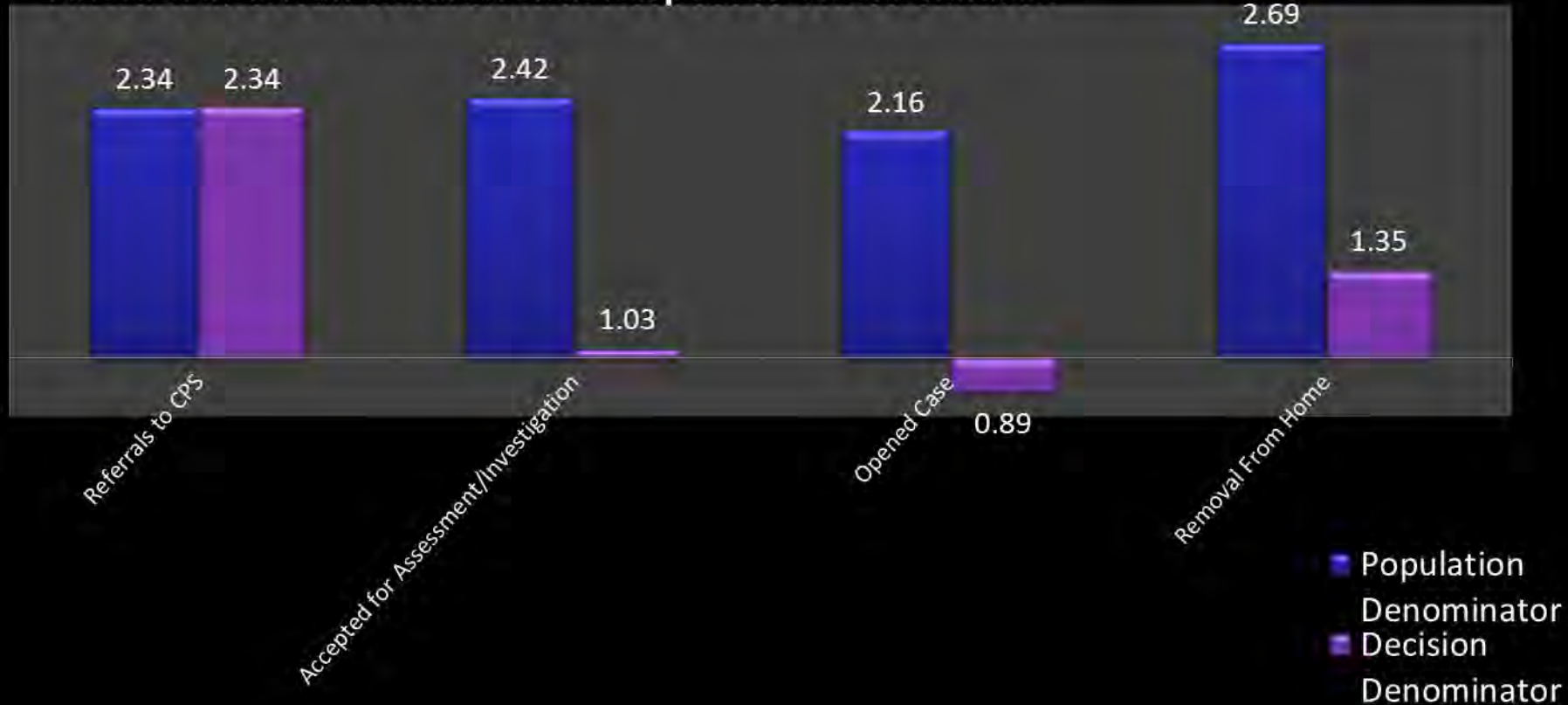
**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT  
ENUMERATING RACIAL  
DISPARITIES AS CHILDREN  
AND FAMILIES MOVE  
THROUGH THE CHILD  
WELFARE SYSTEM?**

# Enumerating Disparities and Disproportionality in Decision Points

- Population Based Denominator Ratios
  - Based on data from one child welfare decision (e.g., new placements/population)
  - Easiest to obtain
- Decision Based Denominator Ratios
  - Based on data from at least two child welfare decisions (e.g., new placements/opened cases)
- Relationship

$$\text{Population Based Denominator}_k = e^{(\sum \ln(\text{Decision Based Denominator}_i))}$$

## Comparison of Population and Decision Based Disparity Ratios - Colorado 2009 African American Children with Respect to White Children



# Summary

- Review is broad in scope even with recent literature
- Race is a legitimate and important focus for research in child welfare

# Summary

- Many areas need to be better understood
  - Incidence/prevalence
  - Absence of key groups (e.g., American Indians, Hispanics)
  - Limited measurement and multivariate and multi-level analysis of explanatory factors
    - Entry decisions
    - Exit decisions
  - Issues with race coding and enumeration particularly in secondary analyses
  - Understanding how and when disparities are inequities
  - Understanding how to effectively reduce inequities
  - Understanding resource gaps and the capacities of communities



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